

Friendship Heights TMD Advisory Committee Meeting

Summary – Meeting of October 14, 2008

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Voting Members Present

April Birnbaum	Lerch, Early and Brewer, Representing New England Development
Leonard Grant	Friendship Heights Village Council
Bill McCloskey	Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights
William P. Farley	Town of Somerset
Gregory Knoop	Oudens + Knoop Architects (Employer of fewer than 50)
N. Leslie Olson	Chevy Chase Land Company
Robert Schwarzbart (Chair)	Friendship Heights Village Council
R. Mallory Starr	Somerset House Management Association
David Viertels	EagleBank (Employer of fewer than 50)
Kenneth Williams	GEICO

Non-Voting Members Present

Sandra L. Brecher	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
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TMD Staff Present

Jim Carlson	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
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Absent

Jessica Moore	The JBG Companies
David Glass	Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers
Chief Roy Gordon	Chevy Chase Village Police
Capt. Russell Hamill	Montgomery County Police
Mary Herman	Polinger Shannon and Luchs (Employer of greater than 50)
Charles Kines	M-NCPPC
Carlean Russell	Saks Fifth Avenue (Employer of greater than 50)

Guests

Fred Delacruz	Saks Fifth Avenue
Bob Joiner	The Agenda News
Julian Mansfield	Village of Friendship Heights
Afua Ofori	Polinger Shannon & Luchs

Items 1,2,3 – Introductions, Review Approval of September minutes, Chair's Comments. Members and guests introduced themselves. September's meeting minutes were approved with minor changes.

Chair Robert Schwarzbart invited the committee members and guests to a dinner dance on November 7, sponsored by the Friendship Heights Village. The cost per person is \$25, and tickets should be purchased in advance.

Mr. Schwarzbart asked the committee members to help ensure that all voices are heard by not speaking out of turn. Occasionally very good points get buried beneath too many people speaking at once. All members will always get their chance to speak.

Item 4 – Metro SmartBenefits Changes: **Jim Carlson** discussed changes to Metro’s Metrochek and SmartBenefits programs. The plan is to phase out Metrocheks entirely by March 31, 2009; Metrocheks will no longer be sold after this November.

Metro is working out the technicalities now for MARC, VRE and MTA Commuter Bus customers, since these systems do not currently accept SmarTrip cards. Those riders will be provided with vouchers, which can be used in exchange for MARC, VRE and MTA tickets. Metro’s expectation is that employers will have switched completely to SmartBenefits by March 31, 2009. Ultimately, the entire regional system will work through the SmarTrip card technology.

- November 15, 2008 is the last day Metrocheks can be purchased through SmartBenefits or any Metro-operated sales facility.
- March 31, 2009 will be the last day that employees will be able to exchange their unused Metrocheks at Metro-operated sales facilities.
- SmartBenefits Vouchers will be available for purchase through SmartBenefits starting December 1, 2008.

Before continuing to the next agenda item, **Mr. Schwarzbart** asked when the Friendship Heights Commuter Store (“*TRiPS*”) might be opening. **Sandra Brecher** said that the County had obtained the Building Permit but that a final approval was needed from Chevy Chase Land Company. Some of the construction has already been underway offsite. **Ms. Brecher** said that there were no problems, just questions back and forth. Once the final approval comes in, **Ms. Brecher** anticipates that it will be no more than 4-6 weeks to open the store. She does not know when the final approval will come.

Item 5 – Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) response to the May, 2008 Wisconsin Ave intersection study: **Barbara Tauben**, Friendship Heights Village Civic Association, stated that she was disappointed in the written response from SHA (letter dated Sept. 30, included in meeting packet).

Since it takes a few readings to fully understand the letter, **Ms. Tauben** put together a document outlining pedestrian and vehicular conflicts, suggested actions, and how SHA responded. This was distributed to the group. **Ms. Tauben** is considering strategies for dealing with pedestrian safety that will not involve SHA the County DOT; and while not finalized or ready yet, she would like to come back to a later meeting to discuss those plans with the TMD Advisory Committee.

Ms. Tauben urged committee members to carefully review the SHA letter to see what was requested, what was suggested, what was actually done by SHA, and to think about what can be done in the future, as **Ms. Tauben** does not believe that SHA’s response sufficiently remedies the problems.

Mr. Schwarzbart suggested the possibility of green arrows at the Wisconsin Avenue & Willard Avenue intersection. At present, traffic exiting Wisconsin Circle attempting to go south by turning left onto Wisconsin Avenue cannot do that; only buses are allowed to turn. **Mr. Schwarzbart** believes that turn arrows, specifically left turn arrows, can be coordinated with the traffic patterns to help move the traffic from the Circle, would help traffic turn left from Wisconsin Avenue, and would promote pedestrian safety since timing for these arrows would be well-defined.

Ms. Tauben said that the Friendship Heights Civic Association had originally requested dedicated turn arrows for traffic heading north from Willard, which is very problematic, and the SHA did not address this issue

Leslie Olson said that with only two lanes on Willard, one of which is a turn right only lane, the addition of a turn arrow for the left lane could create backup problems for Willard. Presently, the left lane gives drivers the option to either go straight or to turn left. The use of a turn arrow would seem to call for three lanes, instead of two. Better enforcement is needed at the intersection.

Ms. Tauben said that SHA did agree to recommend is to add a Pedestrian Leading Interval (PLI) at one corner (from Clyde's to Chico's). This would give pedestrians a few seconds lead time before the signal changes.

Greg Knoop expressed concern that the engineering of the signals would need to be done very carefully to ensure that any solutions address more than just a local concern. For example, even though incorporating these signals may be feasible, we need to avoid motorists racing through the circle to complete their turn before the signal changes. The engineering team will really need to look at the entire area.

Ms. Tauben said that SHA looked at the immediate area along Wisconsin Avenue, including the crosswalks in front of the two medical office buildings, and did not confine their study to the Willard/Wisconsin intersection. It is possible that this is the reason they did not agree with all of the requests put forth to them.

Mr. Knoop suggested that in addition to stronger enforcement that the fines for violations at this intersection be doubled or even tripled. In terms of pedestrian violations, **Ms. Brecher** suggested that it may be possible to use crossing guards to issue warnings to pedestrians, especially during peak periods.

Item 6 – Western and River Road Covered Bus Stop: **Jim Carlson** distributed copies of email correspondence with WMATA officials regarding the placement of the bus stop and the lack of ADA access along the sidewalk in front of the shelter. WMATA is investigating the safety issues and will find a solution. **Mr. Knoop** believes that this group should make absolutely certain that this bus stop is completely ADA compliant, especially since this is in a public space.

With the concurrence of the committee, **Mr. Carlson** will write an email indicating the group's interest in this matter. There was agreement among committee members that the shelter should not be removed, if at all possible, but that it should be moved back or resigned in such a way that wheelchairs would have better access.

Given the committee's mission of dealing with transportation issues, **Mr. Knoop** firmly believes that the committee needs to go on record with this issue and compose a formal letter indicating the current shelter placement is unacceptable. For now, the committee would like **Mr. Carlson** to send an email out, and a formal letter can be revisited.

Item 7 – Veteran's Day: **Mr. Schwarzbart** reminded the committee that the next scheduled meeting is on Veteran's Day, which is a Montgomery County holiday, and as such will need to be rescheduled. The committee agreed to meet on Monday, November 10th.

Item 8 – Other Business: **Ms. Brecher** reminded the committee that the County is working with a very large deficit this year, although in the Federal Bailout Bill a provision was included that would give people who regularly bike to work a \$20 monthly benefit.

Ms. Brecher does not think it will be feasible to market this like the Fare Share and Super Fare Share programs, but she is interested in looking at ways to get the word out. Early thoughts are that the FY10 budget will contain a smaller allocation for every program than the FY 09 budget.

Meeting adjourned at 10:10 am.

Next meeting date: November 10, 2008